

A Skewed Universe: Tragic Vision of Satire in Soyinka's *Alapata Apata*

Nurayn Fola Alimi
Department of English,
University of Lagos, Akoka

Abstract

Satire as a genre of literature thrives on the framework of humour and social criticism. But little attention has been given in critical studies of the form to its potential to represent target subject's conditions tragically. In other words, satiric drama has a potential to deploy certain elements of comedy such as irony, sarcasm, exaggeration, allusion, analogy etc. to achieve a tragic end but this potential has not been subjected to serious critical inquiry. Also, there is an interconnection between humanistic geography and literary imaginative work which enlarges the scope of understanding the human condition but which has been inadequately explored in literary criticism. Apart from the fact that the two fields belong to the essential area of the humanities, both the humanistic geographer and the literary writer often complement each other's quests to "scientifically" explain man's relationships with his physical, ecological, and social environment. In this paper, a case study of satire's potential to share some affinities with tragedy is demonstrated using Wole Soyinka's satiric play, *Alapata Apata* as focus. The study, using the concept of representation in literature as its framework, also interrogates the relationship between the emblematic symbol of the globe alluded to in the play and the skewed universe of the characters. There is a parallel analogy between the cartographic representation of the world and the twisted experiences of the characters, which not only humanises these experiences tragically but also helps in understanding the need for the redemption of the condition of the society which the playwright envisions. The paper concludes that Soyinka's satirical interest has a universal implication for the way the cartographic symbol of the globe could be perceived. Thus, it highlights and discusses aspects of the satirical drama which are deployed to achieve a tragic vision of the human condition.

Key words: *satire, universe, humanity, representation*

*“The explicitly mimetic origin of the map is...an illusion,
since in fact the map is a representation, or rather a
metaphor.” – Vivian Itala*

*“But if satire is a diffuse concept it also remains a
widely diffused practice.” – Joseph Brooker*

Introduction

This essay, which is anchored on the self-evident connections between imaginative literature and humanistic geography, examines the representation of human universe tragically in Wole Soyinka’s satirical drama, *Alapata Apata*. The discussion demonstrates how the play universalises the socio-political condition of the characters through allusion to the cartographic representation of the world. Specifically, it draws on the insights provided by the cartographic modelling of the human world to show the tragic implications of representing the globe in *Alapata Apata*. Even though the play contextualises its satirical objectives by deploying the framework of comedy, the structure of the plot, the process of establishing, heightening, and resolving the conflict contains twisted incidents that ultimately suggest that the experiences of the characters tragically intersect with and parallel the decadences in the global society. Indeed, the satirical strategies deployed in exposing the decadences approximate a plot structure which produces tragic cathartic effect.

Alapata Apata dramatises the follies and foibles of an imagined society where people’s attitudes and conceptions of life are flawed by their penchant for greed and selfishness. The protagonist, having misconceived that life is wrongly captured in the cartographic symbol of the world, makes an attempt to re-order it and in the process damages the globe. The human world, for him, is straight whereas the symbol representing it is twisted. He consequently attempts to straighten the globe; an action which triggers the satirical intent and tragic vision of the play. Alaba’s encounter with the emblem representing the human and physical geography of the world triggers an explosive dramatisation of an entire society’s twisted and decaying values. Through this, the tilted structure of the globe is used as a metaphor of the skewed humanity of the society depicted. The play is Soyinka’s latest effort at using satiric drama to x-ray the lopsidedness in the global social, economic, moral, cultural, and political landscape, using the Nigerian experience as a specific context. The discussion which follows in this essay is, thus, an attempt to explore the nexus between the imaginative capturing of an object (the globe) and the satirical portrayal of the unsavoury and morally disreputable human experiences. To this end, the paper highlights and discusses

the various ways in which Soyinka uses the symbol of the tilted shape of world atlas to parallel the shockingly amusing twisted actions and dispositions of the characters.

Theory and Practice of Satire: The Critical Background Issues

Theorizing the literary and non-literary components of satire, especially in the context of its generic and generally perceived artistic vision and psycho-social functions to humanity, has always been a daunting but interesting engagement. When it comes to isolating and explaining its representational objectives, satire as a genre of art is believed to envision rejuvenating humanity by using certain specialised methods of representational poetics. This way, satire is often conceptualised to provide a critical comment on the moral, social, and other crucial indexes of measuring the human condition in virtually all its ramifications. Commenting on humanity and its existential absurdities is, thus, a crucial conceptual method of satire's strategies that has not attracted so much contestation. But this is perhaps also because the acknowledged imperatives of satire, its artistic vision admittedly, are derived from its concerns with aspects of the unwholesome behaviours of man and how these have affected his social, physical, cultural, and political world. Thus, it is in the aspect of engaging, describing, and characterising the literary and non-literary representational and symbolic strategies that reinforce these incontestable artistic social functions that most theorists and critics have found satire a challenging art to theorize upon.

Two reasons may be said to be responsible for the challenges facing theorists engagement with isolating satiric strategies, at least in the experience of drama. The first is that, metaphorically speaking, satirical drama belongs to a literary tree whose root is implanted firmly in the comic theory but its stems, its formal dramaturgic methods, may deceptively reflect and target variegated emotions. While some members of this comic stem trigger emotions that are invective or farcical, others evoke emotions that sometimes closely relate to the tragic catharsis. In other words, even though satire is not in many respects a genre of tragedy nor of comedy, many satires approach the tragic vision in certain ways by putting characters in situations -psychological, cultural, or social- that make the target subject to command the audience's emotional sympathy. Therefore, satirists are challenged to show that there is more to identifying and classifying the different modes of achieving satiric aim than merely situating them within the comic genre of drama. It is always the problem with satiric drama that as a sub-genre of drama, its tendency to mediate the relationship between comedy and

tragedy through satiric objectives is commonly overlooked in the critical discourse of drama genres.

But for the purpose of clarification of this problem, Gabriel A. Rieger (2009) has conceptually explained “satiric tragedy” as

those tragedies which present satire or satiric castigation as central to their theme or to the course of their action, particularly plays such as *Hamlet*, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, and *The Duchess of Malfi* but including any such tragedies for which we might make the case (4).

It is interesting that Rieger, having acknowledged that Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a tragedy goes on to identify the satiric elements of the play; thus conceptualizing it as “satiric tragedy. “In a related critical discourse on the satiric mode, Alvin Kernan (2011) draws attention to the reverse side of the same satire genre conceptualised by Rieger. For Kernan, rather than being tragedies which include themes that are foreshadowed by satiric intentions, “tragic satires” are sub genres of comedy which share some relationships with tragedy. Accordingly, he opines:

Satire shares darkly serious view of the world with tragedy- thus the resemblance of the satiric and tragic scenes- and both satirist and tragic hero suffer an agonized compulsion to appraise the ills of the world and cure them by naming them (21).

It is obvious from these two insights that, although tragic satire’s primary method of evoking emotion is sometimes somewhere between the tragic-comic and the outright comic, it is definitely not tragedy in its traditional sense. A careful scrutiny of the plot structure and thematic vision of any classic satirical plays such as Wole Soyinka’s *A Play of Giants*, Nikolai Gogol’s *The Government Inspector*, Femi Osofisan’s *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Ngugi Wa Thing’o and Ngugi Wa Mirii *I Will Marry When I Want*, George Bernard Shaw’s *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, or even Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* should modestly be enough to support this view. Somehow the storylines which accommodate the experiences of the satiric subjects are, in these plays, constructed within a plot process that humorously highlights and exposes the darkly perplexing and pitiably confounding human actions and inactions of the society. Besides, although the exploits of the satiric characters in these plays are despicable going by the codes of the ideal, they are also more or less tragic in the

sense of their being carried out in a sequence of amusing reversals and ironies that call for the reader's empathy even as he laughs. Consequently, it can be illustrated that, amongst its various potential conceptual qualities as a genre of drama, satire's generic foundational element covers an interesting range of representational modes of evoking what can be termed "hilarious hamartia." More so, because its mode and process of triggering laughter and pity are sometimes, particularly in classics of the satirical genre, sustained in an environment that is ridiculously tense.

The second problem associated with theorizing the representational strategies of satire may be gleaned from the fact of the satirists' attitudes and interests in certain potential subjects or objects. In this paper, it is illustrated that the satiric intent of the play in focus, *Alapata Apata* is directed on both the human society and the cartographic symbol representing it. The globe is skewed the same way the world it represents is awkward when viewed through human actions. But why are satirists often interested in certain subjects/objects as their objects/subjects of ridicule? It has been stated that, the practice of representing satirically thrives variously on the capturing of the target subject in either an emblematic or in literary style. This shows that satire's literary and general representational boundaries, (in terms of manner of choosing and handling of an object or subject of interest) with some other non literary art, sculpture for instance, may somewhat become difficult to determine. More so when the relationship between drama and other arts, particularly visual art, painting, and drawing etc. is clearly defined and understood beyond merely acknowledging them as the creative response to the human experience. Visual arts, such as sculpture and painting, relate to satirical drama specially because the former sometimes provides the visual symbolic template for the satirist playwright to ponder upon while choosing his subject of ridicule. In such cases, both the visual artist and the dramatist are one in their reliance on and deployment of the concepts of the comic and representation to arrive at seemingly different forms of artistic experience.

There is no doubt that what distinguishes visual art from literature is primarily the mode of representation, otherwise the two fields belong to the family of Art. Also, whatever relationship the two modes share the fact remains that the human experiences that are often conceptualised and satirised in visual art have some anthropological or sociological imperatives that the drama text may not be able to lay claim to. It does not matter that both of them are often regarded as cultural products of the society. Yet, what should be clearly unambiguous in all of this is that, theorists and practitioners of satire across historical periods, cultures, and

genres have generally relied on the generic conceptual framework for creating laughter to represent characters' or subjects' experiences in a humorous style. Hence, this paper examines the case for establishing the relationship between satirical drama and visual art through an analysis of the metaphor of the world atlas in *Alapata Apata*. The purpose of this is to draw attention to the underlying artistic and literary genius that enable the parallels between the characters' experiences and the concept underlying the cartographic representation of the human world symbolically. Essentially the play correlates the pattern of life experiences of the characters with both the physical and the perceptive meaning of life suggested by the world atlas. The overall vision of the playwright is to use the metaphor of the globe to canvass for human redemption out of the skewed condition projected in the play.

At this juncture, one might be curious to know: is it simply for the reason of the underlying sarcasm, humour, and witticism which encourages the practice of satire that many critics have often come to the conclusion that satire is nothing without the elements of wit and or humour? Tentatively speaking, an affirmative answer is not likely if one goes by some landmark reactions to this and allied issues in the discourse concerning the theory and practice of satire. Northrop Frye for example has significantly addressed this question in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* as he offers the argument that satire thrives by choosing an "object of attack" and "wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque and absurd" (224). Frye's explanation would be that, amongst the various modes of identifying the forms of fictional representation, satiric drama may fall broadly within the low mimesis category because of the manner of its deployment of the "fictional" and the "ethos" of expression. Thus, he suggests that the choice of an "object of attack" is sometimes given priority over the overall use of witticism and humour by the satirist. Similarly, critics and ardent practitioners of the satiric art such as John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe etc. also variously subscribe to the normative goals of satire to correct human misdemeanours, and establish some moral rectitude on which a society should blossom. These satirists have shown that satire is effective through the satirist's interest in particular human subject. It is also obvious in theory and in practice that, through the general template of humour and a chosen object the satiric art maximises its prospect to artistically manipulate the image and character of its subject for comic and cathartic effects. In fact, no one will doubt that satirical art is best when it humorously makes its subject matter appear decadent and incongruent to the expected human ideal, with the purpose of triggering a sympathetic feeling of loss in the audience.

Against this backdrop, this paper takes the position that, most of the misdemeanours observed in the characters in *Alapata Apata*, which are humoured are capable of making the global keen observer bewildered, yet, deeply thoughtful. The target individual(s), the human society, and the object which stands for the human world depicted in the play are projected to achieve a tragic effect. To this extent, the vision of the playwright is to represent characters' condition as a tragic reality and to call for a redemption of the world out of the despicable situation.

Literature and Human Geography

Interconnections between literature and humanistic geography have long been a focus of interest to both writers of fiction and humanist geographers. Humanistic geography is primarily interested in the aspects of human physical and ecological world which directly have impact on the human condition. Consequently, it has a shared interest in what imaginative literature pursues as its goals, which is generally to depict and raise issues about man as the centre of the natural, supernatural, and physical environment. Both fields, in fact, belong to the essential areas in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Yi-fu Tuan (1976) states that literature and human geography share the vision to provide near accurate projection of the human world. Their method of achieving this vision, according to him, is by deploying peculiar tools that would approximate "what man does supremely well in the arts and in logical thought" (266).

It is common to read in novels, poems, and plays attempts by writers to creatively illuminate the meaning and understanding of the man-environment relationship. It is not anything new that, writers have depicted the cultural, economic, political, and religious significances of the physical and ecological environment to man and non-humans including the flora and fauna. In African literature, for instance, examples abound where writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thinog'o, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Helon Habila etc. have shown that the physical, ecological, and flora and fauna environment are important to any attempt at understanding the development or lack of development in the human condition. Similarly, humanistic geographers have sought to achieve a robust capturing of scientific reporting of the physical and ecological world by engaging literary works' depiction of known places and environments.

In the area of cartography, imaginative mapping and modelling of the physical space in fictional works have collaborated with geo-critical and eco-critical

inquiries to explain the immediate and remote evidences of the interdependence of literature and geography. Hence, works such as Adam Barrows' *Time, Literature, and Cartography After the Spatial Turn* and Douglas C.D. Pocock's (Ed.) *Humanistic Geography and Literature* have provided a pathway by examining several ways in which insights drawn from the imaginary representation of the geographic physical space, places, time, and the environment can be used to compliment the efforts of the cartographer and general human and physical geography. Since creative writers themselves also do not live in vacuum, they benefit from the knowledge of mapping and ecological analysis of the environment provided by the geographer. Geography therefore benefits from literature as much as literature does from geography.

**Problematising the Literary Representation of the Globe in *Alapata Apata*:
Conceptual Implications**

This essay draws on the conceptual insights offered by James O. Young (1999) in making a case for the connection between emblematic representation and human experiences in literature. Young states that:

[T]here are three necessary conditions of something's being a representation. For a start, if something is a representation of some object, it must stand for the object. Second, if something is a representation, it must be intentionally used as a representation. This may be called the intentionality condition. Finally, there is the recognition condition: nothing is a representation of an object unless it can be recognised as standing for the object by someone other than the person (or persons) who intends that it be a representation of the object (2).

Young's assumptions, which concern the art of representation in literature, are geared towards the recognition of the inherent cognitive properties of literary texts. Much of the cultural and aesthetic values which literary texts are often shown to possess are in this sense understood as pragmatic. Once the three conditions for accepting that literature is representational are met, deductively, literary texts then become one of the strong cultural instruments, through perception and recognition, of societal rejuvenation out of social, political, cultural, and even economic decadence.

This study therefore, adopts Young's position that like all imaginative works of art, Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* is a literary composition representing human experience through the creation of imaginary characters. The play is written consciously to depict the close association between the physical and assumed anthropological meaning of an object (the Globe) and human experiences. The play's underlying aesthetic and cultural aim of representing the human condition is to provide a vision for human redemption from political, cultural, and economic decadence. Hence, the world atlas in the play is an allusion to an actual cartographic globe, which is recognised world-wide as the cultural emblem of the universe while the characters actions depict universally acknowledged human experiences.

Young's theory would, perhaps, also have triggered anthropological implications for or questions concerning the representation of the globe in the play. It nudges our consciousness to the fact that, the depth and literary profundity of literary texts may not be easy to conceptualise using only the criteria of literary representation alone. In other words, the three conditions put forward by Young are plausible but are not strong enough to conceptually capture the genius that underscores the representation of a cultural cum anthropological symbol in literature, particularly an idea of a world that is already captured in a cartographic symbolic form. The satirist, Wole Soyinka it could be speculated, has been influenced both by the social, cultural, and anthropological as well as the literary cum aesthetic factors that influenced the cartographic representation of the human world. In other word, it could be stated that the cultural, aesthetic, and anthropological factors underscoring the cartographic mapping of the world caught Soyinka's attention in the course of his engagement with the thematic, stylistic and "satiric tragic" visions of his play. Actually, the idea of "life" or "world", which the globe represents is analogically related to the events happening in the lives of the characters. The outcomes of Soyinka's engagement could be summed up as reflecting the complexity that usually underscore all artistic productions. Soyinka's ingenious capability to manipulate cultural, mythical and anthropological materials is well established in the discourse of African literature. In this case his knowledge of the Yoruba cosmological view about societal order and cultural attitude to sharp practices are all reflected in his choice of the satirical subjects. In addition, his pre-eminent knowledge of the cluster of devices like irony, witticism, exaggeration etc. which are embedded in the emblem of the world, which the play alludes to, is deployed to achieve the tragic effect of the characters' condition. Consequent upon this, anthropological and literary factors that are implicatively interrelated in the production of the

world atlas are ultimately deployed as analogies by Soyinka, leading to the satiric themes he reveals and the tragic vision he sets to achieve.

Basically, the issues of the relationship between anthropological exigencies and literary knowledge are implications that have historically underscored, in some way, the production of literary art in theory and in practice. The issues are responsible for delineating the sub-genre of drama called Satire to develop into many varieties which, again, further throw up the problem of determining the boundaries amongst many writings that employ the traditional comic parameters as a style. This particular reason has made the literary definition of Satire to be shrouded in difficulties. Marie H. Kelly (1941) observes that:

Satire is not exactly a type of literature in the sense that an epic, a lyric, a novel, or a drama is. It is a species of literary composition. Which has so many closely related branches that it will be well to consider it in its various meanings, even if we cannot set up an accurate definition of it in a general sense. Some authorities consider satire as a process or a method of writing; others as a literary mode or style (12).

For the reasons outlined by Kelly, and probably many more, many satiric plays have been problematic to critics because while they satirically project the image of their victims they also simultaneously imitate, for instance, a conventional speech genre. Satirical plays, in addition to their primary aim of projecting the ludicrous life, also imitate the “Secondary (complex) speech genres” (Mikhail Bakhtin 62).

Indeed, unravelling the profoundness of many classic satires that have employed the emblematic representation can be very challenging. Apart from the concerns raised earlier, it is also the task of the satire critic to isolate and clarify the literary/artistic, sociological and anthropological systems that are often lumped together to define the nature and fabric of satiric representation. One very important reason for this though is that, in anthropology emblematic representations and cultural symbols across artistic divides are used as innuendoes for discovering the important functions that dictate the ways and directions in which the cultural contours of humanity could be identified, traced, and interpreted. For certain, all human societies possess and relate with certain emblems which usually symbolise the often complex worldview of the people.

This also suggests that emblematic representations conceptually carry with them powerful but complex anthropological and aesthetic propensity and values which become the point of attractions to any observer. This is what makes human beings to react emotionally and psychologically to symbols that invectively represent aspects of their experiences. It is for this reason that Alaba's perception and reaction to the globe in the office of the headmaster of his primary school contain cultural and anthropological implications that later in life have to shape the progression of his trials and travails in *Alapata Apata*.

The world atlas, which is an emblematic representation of the human universe in *Alapata Apata*, theoretically, and in anthropological and cartographic senses, represents the cultural and political complexities of the world, particularly for Alaba, the protagonist. In short, the representation of the political and physical geography of the world in a spherical, three-dimensional symbol of the globe he once broke trying to use his "initiative" while in primary school carries with it in his mind, the perceptive social, physical, political, and cultural values accorded to humanity universally. One may, therefore, at this point probe to know whether it is altogether coincidental that cartography, the branch of geography that studies map making and the various processes of its interpretation, has any connection with art, culture, and representation. An affirmative answer to this curiosity would provide a strong case for the argument concerning the link between the art of modelling the world emblematically and the reality about the human reactions to and perceptions of the physical and terrestrial environment.

It has been observed by Itala Vivian (2000) that cartographers, in their attempts to map the world in its geographical sense, are themselves influenced by perceptive artistic taste in addition to their knowledge of cartography (2). Hence, the human experiences of the characters in *Alapata Apata* reminds one of the nearly twisted shape of the globe. Vivian says:

In geography and in maps, writers have always found themes for their narration and a source for inspiration. This is due to the natural affinity rooted in the invention of a descriptive system masked as realism, and to the common origin in the gaze, linked to systems of thought and vision that are strictly interconnected (2).

But would the specific and universal meanings of the symbol of the globe prevent particular individuals and/or specific communities from perceiving it from their personal or communal angles? This is doubtful. In any case, the attitude of individuals and communities to one another across culture, ethnicity, religion, sex, or gender may tell more about the kind of interpretation they are likely to give the symbol representing the world. More so as the cartographic mapping of the world in the emblematic symbol of the globe seemingly reinforces an effectual platform on which people can manifest the meaning of their humanity. The foremost cartographer, Norman J.W. Thrower (2008) has made the case that when:

viewed in its development through time, the map (*the globe*) details the changing thought of the human race, and few works seem to be such an excellent indicator of culture and civilization (16).

Thrower's observation is clarified in anthropological terms by Clifford Geertz (1973) who suggests that the human symbolic world could be used as a vehicle for understanding even abstract ideas like ugliness, foolishness and clumsiness. Emblems, Geertz argues, represent how people conceive of their world (28).

Given the link between anthropological interests in and conceptions of emblems and the artistic demands underpinning the projection of the world in cartographic parlance, it is possible to establish a theoretical connection between abstractions and their representation in art generally, and in *Alapata Apata* as far as this study is concerned. This connection may be further posited conceptually as reflecting the interconnections between the cartographer's self-consciousness, the physical world, and the universal consciousness of abstractions, which Alaba, the protagonist by analogy expresses in the play. Indeed, it would not be out of order to posit that this is a relationship without which the consciousness of both the cartographer and the people, universally, is inconceivable. In line with these observations, Marcus Bullock's (1979) remarks in "The Enclosure of Consciousness: Theory of Representation in Literature" has become plausible. He avers that:

Abstraction in art is the recognition and clarification of specific elements of the activity of consciousness in its self-reflecting phase before it manifests or touches on 'the world.' Artistic representation, bringing in the appearance of the world, concerns what is constituted as 'other,' but in doing so, it makes the world planetary to the solar position of

the individual subjectivity. It reveals or reflects the activity of the subject in creating it (6).

Hence, it is established in my analysis of the play that, there is a link between literature, anthropology, and cartography in matters of representation of the world. The globe which Alaba admits to have broken while in primary school stands to represent the twisted, skewed humanity of the entire world. Alaba's action of breaking this symbol triggers the experience of his travails and the twists which propel the shockingly amusing actions of the rest of the characters. As a young man who had erroneously believed and expected that life should be straight and not twisted like the globe in the School Hall of Queen Victoria Primary School, his action of trying to retire to a life of peace suggests his attempt to reach or enforce the ideal life. In using his initiative to attempt to straighten the globe out of the curiosity that the symbol representing the universe should be straight, Alaba ends up triggering a web of issues and events that reveal the quintessential ways of life of politicians, artisans, soldiers, religious leaders, students, traditional institutions etc. The world of these characters is depicted as characterised by selfish interests, greed, overzealousness, hypocrisy etc. that ultimately add up to make their world skewed, directionless, and distorted. The argument is that the cartographic tilted symbol of the world is used as an allusion to the life of the characters in *Alapata Apata*. This reveals a strong nexus with the ridiculously active and potential character of the human personages depicted in the play, both in specific and universal terms.

Initiative Is a Double-edged Sword: The Skewed Humanity in *Alapata Apata*

Alaba, the protagonist of *Alapata Apata* is the author and centre of conflict in the unfortunate, seemingly inconsequential but tragic misreading of his own retirement by all the members of his society, apart from Teacher. In terms of the structure of the plot and the place of conflict in the play, Alaba remains a quintessential satirical hero who, by error of trying to use his initiative, plunges himself into a situation leading to a series of tragically ridiculous events. These events bring him into confrontation with an already politically, morally, religiously, and culturally corrupt society. It would seem too obvious that there is conflict of perceptions among the characters which might be said to be responsible for the layers of errors of misconceptions about Alaba's choice to voluntarily retire after a successful career in butchering. But one may have to look beyond this into the conflict of values expressed and represented by virtually all the characters to discover the actual problem in the play. The tragedy of the

human world captured in the play lies in the promotion of a jaundiced ideal on which the society thrives.

As a primary school pupil, Alaba inadvertently broke the globe in the school hall because he thought the world and the symbol representing it ought to be “straightforward”, not tilted. He was, according to him “used to seeing things straightforward-up and down, left to right, black and white... (67). By this action, Alaba literally murdered sleep and should not expect to find peace as his perception and experience of life would later prove to him how wrong he is. This is the reason the event, his misapplication of initiative has had a great impact on him generally. He confesses to his friend and mentor, Teacher:

I can't get over the fact that I broke that globe. Since my retirement, my mind has nothing better to do than travel all over the place, all over the past, but the school is always in front...(Alapata Apata 57).

The first shocking consequence of his use of initiative to straighten a skewed symbol of the human world was that, he dropped out of school because his father, Pa Alonge refused to pay for another globe. His education was consequently truncated, beginning his tribulations in life. In search for a straight life as dictated by his perception, he tried his luck in several vocations but could not make any headway until he finally settled for the butchering job of his father. He tried to learn *Ifa* divination but could not cope because he not only had clumsy hands, he also “dropped the divination bowl, spilt the flour, broke an iroke, an ivory one” (160). According to his former master, Araba, Alaba is not a chosen one of *Ifa*, which led to his becoming “a *Ifa* dropout” (159). His experiences as a pupil both in the formal education system and in the specialised school of divinities are something of significance to the conceptions which he nurtured from early in life about life.

There is a connection to be drawn also between Alaba's knowledge and expectations of the cartographic world of the atlas and the epistemological world of knowledge about the ideal life. For Alaba, there is something unsavoury about the human world depicted as tilted and somewhat crooked the same way his life has been largely characterised by lack of success and lopsidedness. Thus, he believes he may be able to explain these mysteries about the human world through learning *Ifa* divination. Even though he could not cope with the intellectual demands of the vocation, it is the same *Ifa* that ironically pointed the direction of

his success to him. He must go back to the profession of his father, Pa Alonge the butcher.

Fortunately he becomes a known professional butcher and his image spread beyond the confines of the village to a global status before he decided to retire. Life has suddenly becomes straight and the only way for Alaba to illustrate this is to retire to a life of rest. He has suddenly decided to spend and enjoy his out-of-job life on the rock in the frontage of his family home after an active, successful career as a butcher. This decision is surprisingly hijacked by his primary school friend, Teacher who believes that the *Suya* expert could well use the development to prove that it is possible to stay away from active service doing nothing for as long as possible. When the play opens, Alaba has already accomplished a thirty day projection and is determined to see it through to the first hundred days. The people of the village are, however, suspicious, worried, and stunned by this development in the life of a middle-aged man generally perceived to have brought fame to both the butchering profession and the village through his expertise in the trade. While some of them express shock with anger and outrage, others speculatively link Alaba's daily routine on the rock to an attempt by him to conceal and dominate a valuable natural resource somewhere under or within the vicinity of the rock. In any case, all the villagers, from the two farmers, the two mechanics, the prospector, pastor, cleric to students and traders develop different theories to explain Alaba's decision.

Indeed, the townspeople's perceptions and reactions to Alaba's decision show them as a community of busy bodies, unnecessarily punctilious, nosy, and prying. These citizens are culpable in the absurd process that transformed the innocent decision taken by Alaba into an undeserved victory and heroism. By first of all paying attention to Alaba's private decision and going ahead to make it a public discourse, the people help in triggering his personal and his mentor's (Teacher's) potential capacities for manipulation. It is not surprising then that Teacher and Alaba later discover a positive loophole in certain errors they have committed and turn these errors around from an initially disturbing situation to advantage. Alaba, in the public perception becomes an enigma that cannot be explained in view of the ways in which he survives the onslaughts of General and Daanielebo. Gradually, he is conferred with a chieftaincy title of Alapata Apata, the paramount chief (Baale) of Apata not actually out of mistakes emanating from the accident of the accent misplacement on the signboard but out of the recognition of his assumed courage to confront perceived very difficult situations.

Through the events and process of making Alaba a chief in the village, his social status is raised in the play. Also it reveals one of the play's very strong universal concerns, which is a focus on the tragic social process through which the underserved members of many human societies universally are made the centre point of social, cultural, and political values and discourse. A social system which put Alaba in a position of power where he, having discovered that the people have erroneously assumed that he has been enthroned to perform traditional chieftaincy roles by the King, begins to attend to community and marriage disputes, is indeed a skewed one that parallels the skewed shape of the atlas globe.

The problem of misjudgement of intention and action in *Alapata Apata* suggests more than a mere chronicle of perceptive social challenges that man faces in his quest for the attainment of the ideal global humanity. Of course, the play is a classic comedy of errors in its method of dealing with the conflict and how it is resolved. But it has to be recognised also that both those who stand in opposition to Alaba's unexpected decision to quit a rewarding career and the protagonist himself are not unconscious of the right values for their collective humanity. What has beclouded their vision of the right value is their selfishness and greed, which put them in an avoidable dilemma of communal progress. This problem and the conflict of perception could be understood further through a critical diagnosis of the problems of societal decadence in all its spheres. Also, it is important to note that the potential ability of individuals to engage in manipulations in order to survive even though there is no clear condition of social lack is pivotal to generating and resolving the conflict. The entire world, to which the globe is a metaphor in the play, is preyed upon by human actions that are absolutely bereft of the ideal.

The conflict in *Alapata Apata* is not also between evil and good as one would normally have in some classical traditional tragic play. Rather, it is the calamitous confrontation between the values that an entire human world sought to hold high up in their heart and those that the individuals have acquired through very decadent processes of socialisation. The world has gone askew for the people of Itira, in terms of the non-linear and crooked structure of the social human relationships. This idea is given a global image in terms of the lopsidedness of events happening in the global world which the atlas represents. It is laughable, confounding that the key sections of the society who constitute the high social order have to perceive Alaba as a threat to their selfish desires. But even more risible is that the lower members of this society are only overzealously interested in the matter as mere speculators in many ways.

An intriguing analogy is drawn between the business negotiations engaged in by some of the characters and in the play and the events commonly underscoring the global business world. The Prospector and his business partner, the Investor, represent a group of the business class whose drive for gains from available economic opportunities across the world is motivated by greed and desire for exploitation. Prospector has uncritically assumed that Alaba has perhaps discovered an important natural resource under the rock which he (Alaba) is not likely to disclose until he is forced to. He has consequently lured a foreign investor into the country to prospect on the concealed item. The two of them are referred to as “Business types” whose major plan is to take control of the suspected natural resources of the land. Prospector hints about the underlying game in this awkward business:

...so you see my friend-we couldn't spell it all out in our email, but it's all about Resource Control. Typical of what's happening in our country. Everyone wants to sit on natural resources... (*Alapata Apata* 9).

That it is later revealed that Prospector is a dubious business type who obviously belongs to a cartel of swindlers is as important as the revelation that the Investor is a selfish foreign business man whose intent is to take advantage of the vulnerable economic situation in developing countries. Both he and his business partner are criminals in different ways. Soyinka's interest in them as characters is to satirise and indict the local and international business environment as one characterised by cheating, greed, and economic corruption. In this way, too, the problem of the lopsidedness in the business and investment world is represented as falling short of the human ideal. The area of human endeavour which their actions index is typically depicted as menacing, lacking any hope of redemption since the resource the Investor and his business partner, the Prospector are struggling to control is non-existent. Ironically, while they discuss business each one of them has a hidden motif to outsmart the other.

Similarly, the human political world is dramatically rendered as falling short of the ideal and clear vision that are capable of salvaging the social, political, economic, and cultural problems challenging the human condition. The institutions which represent the political spheres of the Nigerian experience of governance in *Alapata Apata* are crooked and uninspiring, except for matters of their humorous implications. The three strands of the political institution

represented in the play, the military, the civil/democratic, and the traditional institutions are occupied by persons whose penchant for power, authority, and wealth is misguided and myopic. The military institution symbolises abuse of power, dictatorship, and gross lack of regard for human dignity in the play. In an attempt to pull a fast one on his colleagues in the military; his “brother generals” as he calls them, General mobilises a troop to capture and cordon off a site at Alapata (a quarry) which he believes contains a deposit of “some rare mineral.” His operation is code named “Operation Longa troat” to show his repulsive, greedy desires. But in an ironic twist of events, the commander of the operation, Major leads the troop to Aba Alapata (Butcher’s hamlet) instead of the quarry.

This action angers General who with rage orders the commander to redirect the operation to the appropriate target site because the Major is “off course by at least fifteen kilometers point five” (96). But whether it is the quarry or the hamlet, the concern here is with General’s interest in resource control. He is poised to take control of an entire space containing mineral deposits of huge magnitude. Like the business types, the military as a system and as a career is satirised not just for its own peculiar penchant for greed and lack of respect for human dignity but for the purpose of revealing its dimension of lack of control and misuse of power, particularly as often displayed by the military institution in African countries.

The metaphor of the skewed globe is more entrenched in the play through the reference it makes to the sloppiness and brash political landscape. The most pathetically ridiculous of this experience is the portrayal of political office holders, typically represented in the character of Daanielebo. He is the governor of the state where the actions of the play are projected. It is clear that Soyinka’s interest in the use of sarcasm, irony, and elements of farce are craftily synergised in order to expose the political class that Daanielebo represents as incompetent, ostentatious, myopic, and greedy. The office of the governor is occupied by a character who is although a failure in all facets of life but is able to manipulate his way to the governorship position through the support of a mentor and political godfather, in the person of no other than General. The display of pathological obsession for power and wealth which he shows in his bid to convince Alaba to reveal the secret resource under the boulder is appalling enough to attract human sympathy from observers. The best an observer can do is to sympathize with a neurotic character whose vulgarism is showcased to suggest a bleak hope for the human condition. It is obvious indeed that, the actions of Daanielebo are targeted to parallel the very awkward representation of the world in the cartographic form.

In the final analysis, it can be concluded that the human world and the object representing its universe in *Alapata Apata* are correlated. The lives of the characters are imbued with twisted episodes in such a way that they draw the reader's attention to the affinity between them and the symbol which cartographically represents the world. The correlation further reveals the interplay between the universal perception and communication of the cartographic representation of the world and the human inclination to preposterous actions universally. Both the fictional representation of human actions and the imaginative capturing of the symbol of the atlas globe are yoked into a single metaphor in the play. Hence, the cartographic mapping of the world in an object form that is spherical provides the genius for the satiric rendition of universal human stupidity, clumsiness, foolishness, ugliness, insensitivity etc. in *Alapata Apata*.

Conclusion

This paper has undertaken to consider that Soyinka, using the common literary methods of satire- witticism, paradox, humour, irony etc.—and deploying the symbolism of the globe as a metaphor dramatises universal human objectionable conducts in *Alapata Apata*. The analysis has shown the tragic vision of the world dramatised in the play. As a classic comedy of errors with a high intent of the satiric, the events and actions portrayed represent an attempt to satirise a tragic condition humorously. My discussion has been that the play draws inspirations for themes of contemporary concerns such as abuse of power and privilege, moral laxity and corruptions in various forms etc. from the “fictional” and expressed narratives that humanise the symbol of the globe. Soyinka in this play uses the projection of ridiculous and hilarious characters whose society is lopsided and awkward to draw attention to the shape of the symbol representing the geography of the world. Finally, the paper has recognised that even though arguments may vary as to the morality or immorality of the playwright's representation of these human predispositions, it has been demonstrated most importantly, that Soyinka proposes a vision to change the human perception of the universe and how this is represented symbolically in the image of the globe.

References

- Arnold, J. et al. (1999). Forum on literatures of the environment. *Modern Language Association: PMLA* 114(5): 1089-1104.
- Bullock, M. (1979). The enclosure of consciousness: Theory of representation in literature. The Johns Hopkins University Press: **MNL* 94(5): Comparative Literature , 931-835.
- Diehl, N. (2013). Satire, analogy, and moral philosophy. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Criticism* 71(4): 311-321.
- Dentith, S. (2000). *Parody: New critical idiom*. London: Routledge.
- Gassner, J. (1958). Tragic perspective: A sequence of queries. *The Tulane Drama Review* 2 (3): 7-22.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers.
- Hassan, B. O. (2014). Literature and ecology: A study of Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* and *The Beatification of Area Boy*. *A master's dissertation submitted to the School of Postgraduate Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Holquist, M. & Emerson, C. (trans., 1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Kelly H. M. (1941). Satirical tendencies in modern American drama. Loyola University ecommons, *Masters Theses*, Paper 638.
- Marrows, A. (2016). *Time, literature, and cartography after the spatial turn: The chronometric imaginary*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Olorunto B. S. (1988). Modern scheming giants: Satire and the trickster in Wole Soyinka's drama. *Callaloo* 35: 297-308.
- Pocock, C.D. (ed., 2014). *Humanistic geography and literature: Essays on the experience of place*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Quintero, R. (Ed.) (2007). *A companion to satire*. USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Rieger, A. G. (2009) *Sex and satiric tragedy in early modern England: Penetrating wit*. *USA: Concord University.
- Soyinka, W. (2011) *Alapata Apata. A Play for Yorubafonia, Class for Xenophiles*. Ibadan: Bookcraft.
- Thrower, J. W. N. (2008) *Maps and civilization: Cartography in culture society* (3rd ed.). Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tuan, Y. (1976). Humanistic geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66(2): 266-276.
- *Vivan, I. (2000). Geography, literature and the African territory: Some observation on the

- Western map and the representation of territory in the South African literary imagination. *Research in African Literatures* 31(2): 49-70.
- Wood, N. (2011). Satire. In Julian Wolfreys (ed.) *The English literature companion*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 181-185.
- Young, O. J. (1999). Representation in literature. *Literature and Aesthetics: The Journal of the Sydney Society of Literature and Aesthetics* 9.*